

AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION,
AND RURAL ENHANCEMENT ACT
OF 2001—Resumed

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, the underlying farm bill is on the floor of the Senate. When you talk about economic recovery and economic stimulus, what can promote economic recovery better in this country than to help those on America's farms? Recovery, in my judgment, begins at the roots. It seems to me that what has always nourished America has rolled from the family farms to the small towns and big cities. Whether it is economic opportunity or economic progress, family values have always nourished our country.

Our farmers are in significant trouble. We have struggled and fought and scrapped and tried to get this bill to the floor of the Senate. We have the Secretary of Agriculture calling around saying don't do it. In fact, the Secretary of Agriculture pushed very hard to prevent the House from doing it, and Congressman COMBEST, who is of the other political party—God bless him—said: I am going to do it anyway. It needs to be done; it ought to be done now. And he did it, and ran a farm bill through the House. Good for him.

We are struggling to get a farm bill through the Senate. Senator HARKIN brought a farm bill from his committee, and it is now on the floor of the Senate.

Let me read from a letter of December 10 addressed to Senator DASCHLE and Senator LOTT. It says:

The undersigned farm, commodity and lender organizations write to thank you for your efforts to expedite the debate and consideration of a new farm bill in the United States Senate, and urge that the legislation be completed in a timely manner without delay. We believe it is vitally important that this legislation be enacted this year to provide an important economic stimulus to rural America before Congress adjourns.

We fully understand the policy differences exist regarding this important legislation, and would encourage a healthy debate on these issues. However, we are very concerned that the timeframe to pass this legislation is rapidly drawing to a close. We believe this will require the Senate to complete a thorough debate and achieve passage of the legislation by Wednesday evening, December 12th.

I will include in the RECORD a list of who is who in American agriculture. It is virtually every organization: American Farm Bureau, National Farmers Union, National Corn Growers, National Cotton Council. Virtually every organization that represents family farmers is asking this Senate to do the right thing, to consider this farm bill, move it along today, tomorrow, or the next day, and offer amendments to try to get it out of the Senate and get it into conference so we can put a bill on the desk of the President for signature.

My hope is that we can do that before we leave town. It is a struggle. It is not easy, but it is achievable.

I ask unanimous consent that the letters be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DECEMBER 10, 2001.

Hon. TOM DASCHLE,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

Hon. TRENT LOTT,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATORS DASCHLE AND LOTT: The undersigned farm, commodity and lender organizations write to thank you for your efforts to expedite the debate and consideration of a new farm bill in the United States Senate, and to urge that the legislation be completed in a timely manner without delay. We believe it is vitally important that this legislation be enacted this year to provide an important economic stimulus to rural America before Congress adjourns.

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We urge you to allow members an opportunity to offer amendments that are relevant to the development of sound agricultural policy while opposing any amendments designed to delay passage of this important legislation by running out the clock prior to the adjournment of Congress.

New farm legislation must be enacted this year to stimulate and stabilize our rural economy that has been in an economic downturn for five years with no turn-around in sight. Unlike many sectors of the economy, production agriculture did not share in the economic growth of the last decade and has been devastated by depressed commodity prices, declining market opportunities and increasing costs.

It is critical to producers, farm lenders and rural communities that a new farm bill be approved this fall to provide the assurance necessary to plan for next year's crop production.

We encourage you and your colleagues in the Senate to complete action on a new farm bill as soon as possible to provide adequate time for a conference with the House of Representatives in order to ensure a final bill can be enacted this year.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association.
Alabama Farmers Federation.
American Association of Crop Insurers.
American Bankers Association.
American Corn Growers Association.
American Farm Bureau Federation.
American Sheep Industry Association.
American Soybean Association.
American Sugar Alliance.
CoBank.
Farm Credit Council.
Independent Community Bankers Association.
National Association of Farmer Elected Committees.
National Association of Wheat Growers.
National Barley Growers Association.
National Cooperative Business Association.
National Corn Growers Association.
National Cotton Council.
National Farmers Organization.
National Farmers Union.
National Grain Sorghum Producers.
National Milk Producers Federation.
National Sunflower Association.
South East Dairy Farmers Association.
Southern Peanut Farmers Federation.
The American Beekeeping Federation.
U.S. Canola Association.
U.S. Dry Pea and Lentil Council.
U.S. Rice Producers Association.

United Egg Producers.
Western Peanut Growers Association.
Western United Dairymen.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

SENATE AGENDA

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I would like to talk about a number of things.

First, we are talking about the farm bill, but we have taken many different directions in terms of the economic stimulus. It needs to be extended.

The President suggested a package. The Republicans did not have anything to say about the bill that came out of committee. It was totally Democrat.

We need to make some changes in order to get this done. This isn't about the House. The only talk has been about what the House has done. They can do what they choose. We ought to do what we think is right.

The President asked for an extension of unemployment benefits for 13 weeks for Americans who lost their jobs due to the terrorist attacks. I am sure some will agree with that. He asked for \$11 billion for the States to help low-income workers obtain health insurance for a certain period of time. I suppose everyone would agree with that to maintain that sort of help, wouldn't they?

Also, of course, in order to create some jobs, we have been talking about accelerated depreciation to encourage companies to go ahead and purchase material and purchase machinery to create jobs. That is really what it is all about. Partial expensing, tax relief for low- and moderate-income workers—these are things that are all in the package.

It isn't as if everyone has a different idea, but we ought to have a chance to talk about them. We ought to have a chance to bring up those things and to decide what the majority of this body would like. I am sorry, I do not quite understand how we got off into this: If the Democrats do not agree, then nothing should happen; if the Republicans do not agree, then nothing should happen. That is not the way we should operate. So I am hopeful we can do this. I indeed think we should.

We are going to have to make some decisions in terms of priorities. Obviously, there is not much time left, whether we get out this week or whether we stay until Christmas. In either case, there is not a lot of time.

We have three more appropriations bills in conference that have to be resolved. Those have to be done. We got through a tough appropriations bill last Friday by staying here until 12:30 on Friday night. We will have a tough one with Health and Human Services, I am sure. But those need to be done.

Then we need to make judgments whether we are going to have energy, whether we are going to have a farm bill, whether we are going to have the insurance package—a lot of things that people talk about having. The question